



WELCOME TO CARDOZO
OPEN HOUSE
FOR
ADMITTED
STUDENTS



AN interview WITH



Robert Schwartz

associate dean for admissions

Robert Schwartz, a member of the class of 1992, has been the head of the admissions office at Cardozo for 10 years. *Cardozo Life* editor Susan Davis used the anniversary as an opportunity to hear how Dean Schwartz believes Cardozo has changed and what the law school admissions process looks like from his vantage point.

DAVIS: Ten years ago you left private practice to head up the admissions office at Cardozo. What appealed to you about the job at that time?

SCHWARTZ: I liked practicing law, but I also liked working in admissions. Prior to law school I worked for several years in undergraduate admissions, and I also worked in Cardozo's admissions office while I was a student here. When I heard that the position was open at Cardozo, I had liked my experiences here so much that I thought I had to apply.

DAVIS: There are many Cardozo graduates who return to work here. Do you have a sense of why so many people come back, and is this typical of other law schools as well?

SCHWARTZ: You find more and more people with J.D. degrees in career offices, in admissions offices, and in student services areas. The degree can be helpful, but to return to where you had a good and satisfying experience is particularly gratifying.

DAVIS: Most people understand the admissions process from the viewpoint of the applicant. Can we discuss the process from your vantage point? What are the major challenges for a dean of admissions?

SCHWARTZ: Well, there are many challenges and they vary by

the time of the year. One of the major challenges is simply procedural: how we deal with so much paper and so many people. When I started at Cardozo in 1995, less than 2,000 people applied. This year we had more than 5,000 applicants. So I've seen a tremendous amount of growth, and although we've expanded the staff a little, it is very hard to keep up. To be organized and give admissions decisions in a reasonable amount of time is one of the biggest challenges. The next is to decide who and how many people to admit. You don't want to either over- or underenroll the class. I would say the third big challenge is getting the best and the brightest students to enroll once they are admitted. I think our office is well known for putting a lot of effort into this part of the process. We work hard to give admitted students the information they need to make the best decision for them.

DAVIS: Would you say these three challenges are the most difficult parts of your job, or is there something else you would point to?

SCHWARTZ: Perhaps the most difficult part of the job is that you have to disappoint so many people that truly want to go to Cardozo, many of whom will become great attorneys, and would have benefited tremendously from a Cardozo education and would have been great citizens here.

DAVIS: What are the most common questions you're getting these days from applicants, and have they changed?

SCHWARTZ: More than anything else, people are asking about financing a law school education. Tuition at Cardozo will be close to \$35,000 next year. Our students graduate with an average debt close to \$90,000. Financial aid is the key critical question, and over the years that has escalated.

DAVIS: What about legal careers? Do you see a change in what students are interested in studying in terms of concentrations, or what they are interested in pursuing postgraduation?

SCHWARTZ: I don't know that I can talk much about trends, but many people interested in Cardozo ask about intellectual property law and its subcategories like entertainment law and media law. Lately I've seen more people interested in doing public service than I can ever recall. I don't know how much of that interest is a function of student perspective generally and how much of it is Cardozo's reputation under Dean Rudenstine, who has done a lot to establish more public service programs.

DAVIS: This year you are celebrating your 10th anniversary at Cardozo. What accomplishments are you most proud of?

SCHWARTZ: I'm very proud of the Law School's tremendous growth and to have been a part of the Law School during 10 years of so much change, especially as evidenced in the admissions process. Frankly we've always been able to enroll

“ I've seen more people interested in doing public service than I can ever recall. ”

strong students, but the quality of the students who are coming here now are at the top of the spectrum, and it's very exciting. I'm proud that students are choosing to come here over some other phenomenal law schools.

DAVIS: To what do you attribute Cardozo's growing popularity?

SCHWARTZ: Much of it can be attributed to Cardozo's continued growth in reputation, which, in part, can be tracked through the *US News & World Report* rankings, although I think that prospective students have to take all rankings with a grain of salt. Over the last decade Cardozo has done tremendously well, moving up 30 spots—just one indication of how lawyers, judges, and other academics view us. I don't think you will find many law schools with comparable growth in reputation.

DAVIS: Since you bring up *US News & World Report*, I'd like to discuss it a little bit. Certainly one of the focal points as well as frustrations with admissions is the growing influence this magazine has, especially in Manhattan, where there are so many law schools. Do you see a solution to the way *US News* has skewed the business of admissions?

SCHWARTZ: Well, I think there are two solutions. One is for law school admissions professionals to continue to make an effort not to focus too heavily on rankings. Sometimes this is hard because when a school does well you want to tout your success and Cardozo is no exception. When we're ranked number five in intellectual property law, we like to tell people. But if schools continue to downplay these rankings and explain to prospective students all the factors they should take into account in making an educated decision, it would help diminish the impact of *US News*. The other thing that would help is if there were more law school rankings by other entities or organizations using different scales and criteria. Then, students would be able to make decisions that are better for them based on their talents and interests.

DAVIS: You and I have worked very closely to market the Law School. Do you believe these efforts have had a positive impact or one that you can gauge?

SCHWARTZ: Absolutely. One of the accomplishments I'm most proud of is the amount of effort that we've put into redesigning our Web site and also our search piece, which is sent to people who may be unfamiliar with Cardozo but interested in attending law school, and our bulletin. I think these efforts have had a huge impact and have effectively informed prospective students of Cardozo's strengths. We now have one of the most efficient Web sites out there, and students have taken note.

DAVIS: Do you feel that the admissions process is moving more toward the Web rather than paper?

SCHWARTZ: I do. There's some discussion about the paperless admissions office. This may be where we're headed.

DAVIS: One of the things we haven't discussed that may be interesting, especially to our alumni, is to hear what you tell prospective students about Cardozo.

SCHWARTZ: Let me mention alumni for a minute. Some believe that because of our relative youth we don't have many alumni—especially in senior positions. In truth we now have 8,500 alumni and virtually all of them are working and, when they can, hiring other Cardozo grads. Our alumni are by and large a young, energetic, enthusiastic, motivated group that wants to meet with admitted students. Approximately 500 alumni from all over this country and the world have volunteered to be Cardozo ambassadors. Admitted students can find someone who's practicing in entertainment law or some area they're interested in and make a connection. Alumni also host admitted student-alumni receptions in Washington, Los Angeles, Boston, and Florida. It's great to see and hear our alumni share their experiences with soon-to-be 1Ls.



“ My favorite day of the year is **orientation**.

That’s when I get to stand up in front of 250 people who represent an entire year’s worth of hard work. ”

DAVIS: In addition to the alumni network, what do you believe are Cardozo’s strong selling points?

SCHWARTZ: New York City, particularly the Village, is a very exciting place to go to law school. There are so many opportunities for students in New York. We’ve seen a huge increase in the number of people applying from all over the country—Florida, Texas, and California this year made up 25% of our applicant pool. So New York is a really big selling point. I point to our academic program and the relatively small size of our first-year sections. We have the smallest legal writing sections of any law school, according to our director of legal writing, and we offer a very hands-on approach. Our clinical programs are a huge selling point. Many of our alumni probably don’t even know about the Human Rights and Genocide Clinic or the Securities Arbitration Clinic or the Holocaust Claims Clinic or the Family Court Clinic—all added in the last couple of years. Our new program in family law, a public service scholars program, and The Heyman Scholars program for people interested in corporate law also have been important in recruiting some of the best students we have here.

DAVIS: I know one of your goals is increased diversity in the student body. How do you think we are doing?

SCHWARTZ: We’ve made tremendous progress, although I think we still have a ways to go. When I started here, overall minority enrollment was perhaps 12 or 13%. Last year, total minority student enrollment was 22%. I believe a diverse student body is a better student body; it provides a better quality of education for everyone, and I mean diverse in the widest sense of the word: students from a wide variety of ages, locations, and socio-economic backgrounds. As we

continue to improve diversity in the faculty and administration, I’m sure we’ll meet our goals.

DAVIS: You are considered one of the most dynamic people in the area of law school admissions, and other law schools have tried to lure you away to run their admissions process. What has kept you at Cardozo all these years?

SCHWARTZ: Cardozo is a kind of home to me. It’s where I went to law school and I believe very strongly in it. It is an exciting place to work at an exciting time. We have spent \$40 million on facilities, have a dean who has an ambitious agenda, a committed and energetic Board chair in Kathy Greenberg, who is an alumna, and it’s not insignificant that we have had so much success in the admissions office. It’s hard to leave when you’re doing so well, having a good time, and seeing such positive changes.

DAVIS: What would you say is the best part of your job?

SCHWARTZ: The most satisfying part of my job is to help people decide whether Cardozo is the right place for them. I like doing that. My favorite day of the year is orientation. That’s when I get to stand up in front of 250 people who represent an entire year’s worth of hard work. It feels great to see and meet the new members of the entering class, to hear that they feel good about their decision. It gives me a tremendous amount of satisfaction.

On the first day of classes, I walk around to the classrooms, because I just can’t quite believe that the process is over and that the students are here. I look through the door of first-year classes and see the effort it took to help students make their choice to come here. To see each of them is just an amazing feeling. ■